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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000473

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MAY 10 U.S.-CZECH POL-MIL TALKS

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons
1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (SBU) The objective of the May 10 Political-Military talks is to strengthen and nurture the Czech Republic's already-strong transatlantic instincts, and achieve forward momentum on key areas of mutual concern. While the entire range of topics for discussion will advance this agenda, the talks will impact Czech decision-making on two key strategic issues: 1) potential export of the VERA passive surveillance detection system; 2) a Czech-led PRT for Afghanistan. This is the first joint State-DOD bilateral pol-mil talks ever held with the Czech Republic, and it will shape and influence the security policy recommendations made to the new Czech Government, which will be formed after the June 2-3 general elections.

¶2. (SBU) The Czech delegation at these talks will be made up of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, some of the most senior security-policy personnel who will remain in place after the elections. The head of the MFA delegation is Security Policy Department Director Veronika Kuchynova-Smigolova. Head of the MOD delegation will be Defense Policy Department Director Radomir Jahoda. The MFA and MOD have generally similar views on security policy, although the MFA is more in favor of additional military deployments than the MOD and less protective of the Czech arms industry. Getting buy-in from this group of Czech officials on USG ideas will pay high dividends; their recommendations will help determine the security policy of the next Czech Government. These are also the people who will implement that policy.

¶3. (SBU) While the Czechs have been strong and eager allies of the United States, they will have potentially competing demands in future years. Action now to reinforce the Czech-U.S. pol-mil relationship will pay dividends. The evolution of ESDP will place greater demands on the operational capacity of the Czechs, and we must continue to ensure that ESDP commitments, such as the Czech promise to provide an EU Battlegroup in 2009, do not come at the expense of a robust NATO and an active transatlantic security relationship. French efforts to make the EU more independent of the U.S. and NATO have been echoed by the Green Party, a possible kingmaker in the June election. The major parties that could form a government quickly dismissed the Greens, statement, but we should make every effort to demonstrate to the Czechs that the way to a strong, secure and dynamic

future lies in transatlantic ties and a reinvigorated NATO.

Political Environment

¶4. (U) The United States and Czech Republic enjoy excellent bilateral relations; Czechs are strong supporters of transatlantic relations, NATO and the Global War on Terror. While all policy discussions are colored by upcoming general elections June 2-3, no significant changes in Czech foreign policy are expected under the new government.

¶5. (U) For a small country, the Czech Republic punches far above its weight. The Czechs are an active and worthy partner of the United States. The Czech Republic currently contributes over 800 soldiers, observers, monitors, specialists, and civilian police to missions throughout the world. Militarily, the Czechs are involved in NATO, EU, U.S., and UN-led operations in Iraq (where they have 100 military police training Iraqi security forces in Basra), Afghanistan (a Special Forces detachment is deploying this month, for the second time, to work with the U.S. in Kandahar), Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere.

¶6. (U) The Czech Republic has distinguished itself as a strong advocate of democratic change in some of the world's most controlled societies. The Foreign Ministry has formed a separate office to support and fund democratic transformation, largely using accomplished Czech NGOs to transfer lessons learned from the Czechs, own transformation. Czechs are active in promoting civil society in Cuba; within the EU the Czechs are recognized as the

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leader of efforts to craft a common policy that actively supports peaceful dissidents and limits official contacts with the regime. Belarus is another priority country and here, too, the Czechs are emerging as a catalyst for EU efforts to support the democratic opposition.

¶7. (U) The only notable bilateral irritant is the visa issue. Citizens in 14 of the 15 countries that were in the EU before the expansion of May 2004, can travel to the U.S. for short business/tourist visits without visas under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). Americans can travel to the Czech Republic for short stays without visas. Czechs believe they deserve VWP status as an EU member and coalition ally. The visa refusal rate is currently around 10% -- the lowest in the region, but well above the 3% required for entry into VWP. Unfortunately, the approaching election has turned this into a political issue, with both the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister promising last month to "toughen" their approach to the United States in order to address what they see as asymmetrical visa relations.

¶8. (U) The U.S. and Czech Republic are implementing the "Visa Roadmap," proposed by President Bush to help pave the way for eventual Czech entry into VWP based on existing criteria. The Czechs are also pressing the EU to take a tougher line with the USG in negotiations on the issue. While we do not anticipate this issue will be raised during the pol-mil talks, it may come up on the margins. If raised, it is sufficient to reiterate the USG desire for eventual Czech entry into the VWP and reference the commitment of the two countries to move forward, within the confines of existing legislation.

Specific Objective One: VERA

¶9. (S/NF) A Czech VERA passive surveillance system in the wrong hands would pose a significant threat to U.S. forces. Our allies in the Czech Republic recognize this, and to date the Czech Government has refused to allow the sale of the

VERA-E or its variants in cases where the USG has signalled strong concern. This cooperation with the U.S. has not been without difficulties and has come at a political cost to those within the Czech Government that are most committed to ensuring a strong relationship with the United States. Our priority for these talks is to ensure that any future Czech Government will remain dedicated to protecting our strategic interests, even when doing so carries a significant economic cost through lost sales to their defense industry. We can encourage this outcome and establish conducive atmospherics by acknowledging up-front the financial opportunity cost and internal political battles for the Czech decision to refrain from exporting VERA. We can then discuss establishing an effective consultative mechanism for future cooperation on VERA.

¶10. (S/NF) The Czech government does not speak as a coherent whole when considering VERA policy. Opinions range from support for widespread sales (in the Ministry of Industry and Trade and in parts of the Ministry of Defense), to a priority in ensuring that Czech exports do not harm the interests of key Czech allies such as the United States (MFA's usual line). The U.S. team should exploit differences of opinion on the Czech side to secure the best possible outcome.

¶11. (S/NF) The Czechs will describe increased VERA sales as a political and economic imperative. Supporters of increased sales may suggest that the United States should bear some responsibility for increasing sales, in return for Czech cooperation on refraining from exports to questionable countries. We will need to counter this by framing the VERA issue in the wider strategic context, and making the Czech side understand that the U.S. is neither prepared to guarantee the welfare of a particular company, nor risk transfers of technology to countries that may become military foes of the U.S. in the future.

¶12. (S/NF) Both our friends and foes within the GOCR on the VERA issue have criticized the U.S. for failing to respond in a timely manner to Czech requests for USG opinion on

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particular VERA exports. Czech law gives our friends in the MFA only 30 days to represent our interests, after that they are legally compelled to give a recommendation on the issuance of a VERA export license. We will be able to overcome this assertion by conveying to the Czechs that a nine-month response time is a thing of the past.

¶13. (S/NF) The Czechs have also alleged that the U.S. does not give sufficient consideration to Czech interests when objecting to Czech VERA exports to countries such as Pakistan. Depending on the mood of the discussion we can expect questions about how Pakistan can be a destination for U.S. military technology exports, and not for Czech technology. Accordingly the Czechs have expressed interest in the details of our nonproliferation techniques. While they maintain that their own counter-proliferation measures are sufficient, they may welcome cooperation in that arena, especially if that would mean that the United States would have fewer objections to VERA sales.

Specific Objective Two: A Czech-led PRT in Afghanistan

¶14. (C) The MFA and the MOD are currently engaged in a months-long dispute about the merits of the Czech Republic leading its own PRT in Afghanistan. The MFA sees this as a logical way for the Czech Republic to receive the recognition it deserves for its activities in Afghanistan. While the MOD acknowledges the political benefits, it is focused on the logistical challenges of mounting such a mission. MOD representatives have said they would welcome the U.S. position on the idea of a Czech PRT and U.S. ideas on how to overcome the logistical challenges. We should encourage this

venture, but should avoid giving the impression that the United States is in a position to provide the necessary logistical support. It is likely that the Czech side would welcome diplomatic support in finding suitable partners to cover the necessary shortfalls.

Missile Defense

¶15. (S/NF) U.S. plans for a missile defense system is a topic that is best not addressed during the pol-mil talks. Not all Czech participants in the talks are aware that the U.S. and the Czech Republic are engaged in ongoing technical negotiations about possible site selection for a missile defense base. MOD representatives say that the Czechs, current low-profile approach to missile defense is designed to safeguard their multi-year, ongoing commitment from possible misuse by unscrupulous politicians during the current election season.
DODMAN